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THESIS

MILITARY RETENTION: A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING OFFICER SEPARATION IN THE NAVY EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE DISPOSAL COMMUNITY

by

Mark D. Gutierrez

December 2016

Thesis Advisor: Sean Everton
Second Reader: George Lober

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MILITARY RETENTION: A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING OFFICER SEPARATION IN THE NAVY EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE DISPOSAL COMMUNITY

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This thesis explores and identifies trends in officer separation within the Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) officer community. It blends analyses of a survey conducted on active duty EOD officers with interviews of former EOD officers to better understand why the community struggles to meet manning requirements at the eight-to ten-year mark. Analysis of the data indicates that family stability, leadership, military bureaucracy, and limited operational time each are factors in the community's retention problem. Of those, this thesis proposes that leadership focus on a factor it can influence—operational time. In particular, it proposes that longer tours and extending operational time for junior officers may mitigate officer separation.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CO	Commanding Officer
CSRB	Critical Skills Retention Bonus
DOPMA	Defense Officer Personnel Management Act
DH	Department Head
EP	Early Promote
FITREP	Fitness Report
FRTP	Fleet Readiness Training Plan
IRB	Institutional Review Board
LDO	Limited Duty Officer
MP	Must Promote
NPC	Navy Personnel Command
NPRST	Navy Personnel Research, Studies and Technology
P	Promotable
RCRP	Readiness Cost Reporting Program
SP	Significant Problems

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I. INTRODUCTION

In *Bleeding Talent: How The U.S. Military Mismanages Great Leaders and Why It's Time For A Revolution,* author Tim Kane asserts that regardless of the service or specialized skill, the Department of Defense is currently bleeding its most precious resource: talented and experienced officers.[1] Retention of the *right* personnel—experienced strong leaders—is a force multiplier for the military, and, therefore, the specific issue of retaining talented and experienced officers has become crucial. According to a 2012 survey conducted by Allman, Fussell, and Timmons, CEOs and top leaders in the private sector dedicate 25–33% of their time to developing and retaining their top people.[2] If the top leadership in the private sector is dedicating this amount of time to their best performers to ensure the success of their respective organizations, then perhaps the military should too.

In the military, it is common knowledge that the force size expands and contracts over time. Similar to today's military drawdown, the U.S. military drew down its forces after the Cold War, and, similarly, many of the conversations taking place today with regard to retaining the right people took place then as well. The difference is that today's policy seems conflicted. Granted, "talent management" has become a buzzword in military circles for retaining the right people. However, despite the need to retain the right people, there is a strong desire in Washington to reduce the force due to budgetary constraints. These contradictory goals—reduce the force, but hold on to our valuable personnel—are not always compatible.

A 2006 study by Korn/Ferry International concluded that former male military officers are almost three times more likely to become CEOs than other American males.[3] This study points to the ability of military officers to make complex decisions, work in

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[1] Tim Kane, *Bleeding Talent: How The U.S. Military Mismanages Great Leaders and Why It's Time For A Revolution* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan 2012).

[2] Walter Allman et al., "High Value Talent: Identifying, Developing, And Retaining Naval Special Warfare's Best Leaders" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2012).

[3] Tim Kane, "Why Our Best Officers Are Leaving," *The Atlantic,* January/February 2011, 3.

teams, and motivate others as contributing factors. All of these qualities are key aspects of military culture. Thus, the study suggests that there is a strong need for military organizations to accommodate their talented and experienced officers in order to retain the most qualified personnel, rather than lose them to the incentives of the corporate sector.

In 2013, the U.S. government faced a massive cut to military spending. In response, the services were forced to cut thousands of personnel, with the Army taking the brunt of the hit. Some of those cuts continue today.[4] Yet due to its specialized skillset, the Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal Officer Corps remained unscathed. However, the community is not immune to personnel management problems. It has struggled to maintain personnel numbers at the Lieutenant Commander (O-4) rank. In 2005, the community required seventy-seven Lieutenant Commanders and fifty-five Commanders in order to be fully functional, but only possessed seventy and fifty, respectively.[5] Moreover, the community's official requirements do not accurately reflect all requirements being filled by the EOD community. The numbers do not take into account the billets that are filled by the community but are not necessarily a requirement—namely, 1000 and 1015 billets.[6] While these billets are not a requirement, it is imperative that the community fill them. These requirements exacerbate the community's manning problems.

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[4] "The Truth About Military Cuts," *New York Times*, July 31, 2012, accessed on September 16, 2016. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/01/opinion/the-truth-about-military-cuts.html; David Larter, "Thousands of Navy Jobs To Be Cut In Fiscal 2017, Sources Say," *Navy Times*, February 8, 2016, accessed on September 16, 2016, https://www.navytimes.com/story/military/2016/02/08/thousands-sailor-jobs-cut-fiscal-2017-sources/80013688/; Doug Salvemini, "Details of the Military Force Reduction," *Fox Business*, October 28, 2015, accessed on September 16, 2016, http://www.foxbusiness.com/politics/2015/10/28/details-military-force-reduction.html; Jacqueline Klimas, "Lawmakers Say They Were Blindsided by Army Cuts," *The Washington Times*, July 8, 2015, accessed on September 16, 2016, http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/jul/8/obama-admin-cut-40k-army-soldiers/.

[5] LCDR Clint Cornell, email message to author, April 11, 2016.

[6] According to the Manual of Navy Officer Manpower and Personnel Classifications Volume 1, Part A, a 1000 is a "billet which may be filled by any appropriately skilled and experienced unrestricted line officer or special duty officer." A 1050 billet requires a Lieutenant (or above) who is warfare qualified in the required warfare specialty. EOD is an example of a warfare specialty.

In summary, the disparity between Navy EOD requirements and actual manning is much greater than what is captured by traditional manning numbers. In response to the manning shortfalls, the community began offering a critical skills retention bonus (CSRB) to curtail the loss of experienced officers leaving the community. Currently, despite the CSRB being implemented for over a decade, the community is still lacking at the senior Lieutenant (O-3) and junior Lieutenant Commander (O-4) pay-grades. On the surface, it may appear that the community is failing to promote at an appropriate threshold. Unfortunately, the promotion rates indicate otherwise. The EOD community out performs the rest of the Unrestricted Line communities across the Navy. The average rate of EOD Officers' promotion from Lieutenant to Lieutenant Commander is above 90% for the last five years, whereas the rest of the Unrestricted Line communities' five-year average is just below 75%.[7] This greater promotion rate indicates that navy EOD officers are competitive and are out performing personnel across the service. It also indicates the EOD's ability to attract the best and brightest. Paradoxically, it also emphasizes the retention problem. If the community is attracting individuals who are outperforming their peers across the service and promotion opportunities are present, why is the community consistently struggling to meet the manning requirements at the eight-to ten-year mark?

This thesis's purpose, therefore, is to explore why EOD officers are leaving the community at around the eight-to ten-year mark. Drawing on survey data and interviews, this thesis explores active duty EOD officers' grievances and compares them to the grievances expressed by former EOD officers in an effort to better understand how the Navy EOD Community can better retain its best officers.

A. BACKGROUND

In 2011, Tim Kane, a former Air Force officer, explored the Army's retention problem. He concluded that the problem stems from the Army's structure. According to

[7] LCDR Clint Cornell, email message to author, April 11, 2016.

Kane, it is "deeply anti-entrepreneurial."[8] He believes that a zero-defect evaluation process is evidence of this.[9] A zero defect mentality harshly punishes individuals who make a mistake, which, in turn, creates a risk averse force.[10] Consequently, a zero-defect mentality sacrifices an innovative and entrepreneurial spirit for a flawless record because as long as individuals stay out of trouble and do not receive poor marks, they are likely to promote.

Kane's argument can be applied similarly to the Navy's evaluation process. For example, the Navy's Fitness Report (FITREP) has an area reserved for promotion recommendation (Block 42), which enables a reporting senior to remark on an individual's performance in relation to promotion. Reporting seniors can choose from five categories: significant problems (SP), progressing, promotable (P), must promote (MP), or early promote (EP). Bureau of Navy Personnel Instruction 1610.0D explains the formal guidelines on how to properly complete this section. It also provides limits on the number of MPs and EPs respective to the summary group size.[11] However, the instruction does not include are the informal practices associated with the FITREP process. Unfortunately, anecdotal evidence suggests that high marks in this section are often more dictated by an individual's time at the command rather than his or her performance. For example, an individual who arrives at a command recently is likely to receive average marks, regardless of his or her performance, compared to an individual who has been at the same command longer, but has not performed as well. Additionally, once an individual is given the EP slot, it is unlikely he or she ever will receive a lower mark during his or her remaining time at this command, regardless of performance, because anything other than "tracking to the right" is perceived as poor performance.[12] At a promotion board, marks that go from an EP to an MP or an MP to a P will

8 Tim Kane, "The Leader/Talent Matrix: An Empirical Perspective On Organizational Culture" (working paper, Hoover Institution Economics Working Papers, Stanford University, CA, 2015).

9 Tim Kane, "Why Our Best Officers Are Leaving," 3.

10 Tim Kane, "Why Our Best Officers Are Leaving," 3.

11 Summary group size is the number of people at a given pay-grade being evaluated during a given period. For example, if a command had four Ensigns, the summary group size would be four.

12 "Track to the right" refers to positive career progression. If an individual continues receive positive marks on his Fitness Report, he will "track to the right."

undermine the individual's possibility of being selected for promotion. Many Commanding Officers (COs) do an excellent job managing this ranking issue to mitigate problems; however, there are always exceptions. Not only do practices such as the FITREP ranking system periodically limit an individual's ability to "track to the right," but they also hinder accurate performance reporting, which, in turn, prevents the Navy from promoting its officers by merit. Instead, individuals receive positive marks by a time schedule that parallels the Navy's time-based promotions.

As noted previously, the best evidence of this is anecdotal. For example, assume that Officer X and Officer Y are commissioned on the same date and complete the exact same number of combat tours. On their sixth year of active duty, both check in to the same command. However, officer X checks in two months before Officer Y. During the first year, at this command, Officer X maintains status quo in his department and faces little job-related adversity. Conversely, Officer Y inherits a department that is plagued with problems ranging from failed inspections to legal investigations. Despite this, Officer Y turns his department around, rebuilds relations, and his department passes all applicable inspections. When the annual evaluations come out, however, Officer X is ranked over Officer Y because of time at the command, and this ranking trend then continues for both officers for their remaining evaluation periods at the command. Despite the heavier workload, Officer Y's ability to stand out among his peers is constrained strictly by his time at command, and not by either his performance or his work ethic.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Peter Cappelli in *Talent Management for the 21st Century*, the main reason an employee leaves is because of better opportunities elsewhere.[13] In the military, service members leave their respective positions for opportunities in the private sector, where they believe they will not be bounded by bureaucratic processes.[14] Cappelli

[13] Peter Cappelli, "Talent Management for the 21st Century," *Harvard Business Review*, March, 2008, 4.

[14] According to survey a conducted by Tim Kane, 82% of individuals who left the Army listed, "frustration with military bureaucracy" as their top reason for leaving.

proposes that seeking a balance between the interest of the employee (service member) and the employer (the respective service) is the best strategy for curtailing employee turnover.[15]

Predating Cappelli's proposal by sixteen years, though, a 1992 RAND report by Rostker, Thie, Lacy, Kawata, and Purnell assessed the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act (DOPMA) of 1980.[16] Congress designed DOPMA in order to create a personnel management system that applied to all services. DOPMA would manage training, appointments, promotions, separations, and retirements.[17] According to Rostker et al., DOPMA is better designed to build the officer corps than to reduce it.[18] The report contends that several mechanisms enable personnel managers to increase their force, such as a variety of commissioning programs that facilitate the conversion of reserve officers into a regular officers, an increase in promotion opportunities, and the expansion of field grade officers' numbers by increasing the available vacancies. However, when it comes to reducing the force, personnel managers are constrained by laws and policies on how they are authorized to "cut the fat."[19]

DOPMA is also Tim Kane's critical target in terms of reform. Kane conducted a survey of West Point graduates in 2010 with 250 individuals from various commissioning years. Only seventy-eight were still on active duty. His final question in the survey was "What were the reasons you left the military? Agree or disagree if they were important reasons for your decisions."[20] The participants could then choose from several possible reasons. The top four responses were: frustration with military bureaucracy, family, other life goals, and high potential income. 82% of the respondents agreed to some degree (50% Strongly Agreed, 32% Agreed) that frustration with military bureaucracy played a role in their departure from the service. Eighty-one percent agreed to some degree (57%

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15 Cappelli, "Talent Management," 4.

16 Bernard Rostker et al., *The Defense Officer Personnel Management Act of 1980: A Retrospective Assessment*, (California: RAND Corporation) 1993.

17 Rostker et al., *The Defense Officer*, 7.

18 Rostker et al., *The Defense Officer*, 18.

19 Rostker et al., *Defense Officer*, 18–19.

20 Kane, *Bleeding Talen*t, 97.

Strongly Agreed, 24% Agreed) that family also played a role in their departure from the service, whereas, 80% felt that higher income outside of the Army played a critical role in their departure. Kane drew on these results to conclude that the majority of the service members were getting out due to frustrations with the military. His findings were published in both *The Atlantic* and in his book, *Bleeding Talent*.[21]

While Kane's results appear conclusive, there are some weaknesses in his analysis. As mentioned above, of the 250 respondents only seventy-eight (31%) were still active duty. This imbalance between active duty and former active duty creates a bias toward the opinions of those who are no longer serving. Additionally, an argument could be made that by the possible answers that Kane offered to the final question, he led his participants to reach the conclusion he was seeking. It is possible that had the final question been open ended, the survey would not have yielded such conclusive numbers. Lastly, Kane fails to define what he means by military bureaucracy. His research and articles lead the reader to believe he is referring to the constraints imposed by DOPMA, but whether that is exactly what he means remains unclear.

In 2015, the Navy stood up Task Force Innovation.[22] Since its inception, Task Force Innovation has increased the amount of fully funded billets for follow-on education at the nation's top schools. Furthermore, the Navy is now taking steps to expand its Tour of the Industry program, which enables successful sailors to work at America's top firms.[23] Many of these changes were sparked by the Secretary of the Navy, Ray Mabus. On May 13, 2015, Mabus addressed the graduating class of the United State Naval Academy and outlined his plan to implement a talent management process for the Navy. He stated how the Navy is improving its efforts to get the right person in the right position and referred to the Office of Talent Optimization at the Naval Academy, which focuses on matching midshipmen to a community within the Navy based upon the

[21] Kane, "Why Our Best Officers Are Leaving."

[22] Mabus, "Talent Management."

[23] Mabus, "Talent Management."

individual's strengths and interests.[24] Unfortunately, Mabus offered no empirical data to support his claim, which could be due to the short time period between the program's inception and this research. The innovative plan proposed addresses many of the grievances addressed in Kane's book. However, many of the recommended changes promoted in Mabus's speech are not legally possible without Congressional approval. The Navy's personnel managers, much like those in the other services, are constrained by law. They do not have the ability to act autonomously even if the desired end state aligns with the needs of the Navy.

This constraint, although specific to the Navy, reflects the general military bureaucracy Kane discusses in his article, "Why Our Best Officers Are Leaving."[25] Kane does not specify which communities participated in his survey, and one may question, whether Kane's conclusions about the cause for Army officers' separation apply to the entire uniformed service?

C. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Data for this thesis's analysis draws on two sources: A survey of active EOD officers conducted by the Navy Personnel Command (NPC) and a series of interviews carried out by this thesis's author. The goal of the NPC survey, which the Navy Personnel Research, Studies, and Technology (NPRST) division carried out in early 2016, was to identify major grievances within the EOD officer community so that the Navy could do a better job of retaining talented individuals. This thesis draws on some of the survey's responses in order to help explore why officers may be leaving the EOD community. However, because the survey was administered only to officers still within the community, it also draws on interviews with individuals who have left the EOD community. This dual analysis allows for a comparison between active and separated officers, which will help identify any distinct patterns unique to the two groups.

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[24] Ray Mabus, "DoN Talent Management Address to the Brigade of Midshipmen" (2015), United States Navy, http://www.navy.mil/navydata/people/secnav/Mabus/Speech/USNA%20Talent%20Management%20Speech_FINAL.pdf.

[25] Kane, "Why Our Best Officers Are Leaving."

Unfortunately, due to the constraints set in place by the Paperwork Reduction Act, which limits the federal government's capacity to interview civilians, only nine former EOD officers could be interviewed.[26] This limitation makes it difficult to draw any definitive conclusions about the current situation, and it could invite skepticism from some quarters. Nevertheless, by combining the information gathered from the interviews with data from the NPC survey, tentative conclusions and recommendations can be reached, which, in turn, can inform future research and studies.

The next chapter discusses and analyzes the survey responses, while Chapter III discusses and analyzes results from the interviews. Both chapters discuss how the data were collected, categorized, and coded before presenting the analysis and discussing the results. Chapter VI serves as the thesis's conclusion. It offers policy recommendations based on the analyses in the previous two chapters.

[26] U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee of Government Reform, *Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995,* 104th Cong., 1st sess., https://www.congress.gov/bill/104th-congress/house-bill/830/text

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II. NPC SURVEY

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Navy Personnel Command organized the survey of active duty EOD officers, while Navy Personnel Research, Studies, and Technology (NPRST) division conducted it. The survey's goal was to identify major grievances within the EOD officer community so that the Navy could be better positioned to retain talented individuals, as well as to identify a baseline from which trends can be identified. It sampled 443 active duty EOD officers, out of which 229 responded. This is a response rate of 52%, which is lower than ideal but is acceptable. The survey opened on January 25, 2016, and closed March 7, 2016. It consisted of thirty multiple choice questions and four open-ended responses. Initially, the survey focused on demographics. As the survey progressed, the questions focused more on the individual's experiences within the community through mentorship, professional and personal goals, and overall satisfaction. The goal of NPRST's survey was to identify any major grievances within the EOD officer community in order to better address those grievances and retain the top talented individuals.

This thesis will only focus on two of the open-ended responses—Question 32 and Question 34. Question 32 asked, "If you could change one thing about the [EOD] community [*sic*] what would it be?," while Question 34 only asked respondents if they had any additional comments. Question 34's lack of direction allowed the respondents to write on whatever topic they pleased. Since many of them apparently saw this as an opportunity to identify possible needed changes within the EOD community, their responses often addressed many of the same issues identified in Question 32. Thus, many of these responses were incorporated with the responses to Question 32.

In an attempt to code the responses as objectively as possible, the responses to the two questions were read three times during the coding process. The first reading, or "pass," employed an "open coding" technique with the goal of identifying broad themes and patterns.[27] After these were established, the responses were read again, this time

[27] W. Lawrence Neuman, Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches, 7th edition (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2011), 511.

employing an "axial coding" technique, which focused more on the preliminary categories than on the data itself. Axial coding identifies trends within the trends and possible correlations and subdivisions.[28] This step is crucial for discerning distinctions between the responses, and it allows researchers in the final reading to identify clear trends. The final reading consisted of "selective coding," which sought to bring the responses and trends together.[29] When this step was completed, the data were organized into nine categories: Administrative Requirements, Career, Community, Education, Gender, Mentor, Structure, Training, and Other.

A. RESPONSE CATEGORIES

1. Administrative Requirements

Administrative Requirements refers to obligations generated by programs such as the Readiness Cost Reporting Program (RCRP), or other duplicate reporting generated by the Group or Mobile Unite level. Comments concerning administrative requirements were divided into general administrative requirements comments and comments focused on EOD Warfare qualification, which outlines the administrative and operational requirements that a junior officer must obtain prior to being a fully warfare designated officer. Over the last few years, EOD leadership focused on and reviewed the process in attempt to make revisions, but with change often comes criticism. An example of a comment concerning general administrative requirements is, "The administrative reporting systems do not reflect the operational needs of the community." An example of a comment concerning EOD Warfare qualification is, "It is becoming more and more common for a JO to earn an Officer Badge prior to ever having completed an EOD deployment. This has inherent concerns." Many of the comments that focused on the EOD Warfare qualification expressed similar feelings—a general displeasure with the current qualification.

[28] Neuman, *Social Research Methods,* 512.

[29] Neuman, *Social Research Methods,* 514.

2. Career

Career comments focused on an individual's progress through the community, the promotion process, retention, separation, or any other force-shaping tool (e.g., financial incentives and desirable assignments). Career comments were divided into general career comments, family, FITREP process, career progression, and retention. The general career comments focused on career-oriented ideas, but they did not occur frequently enough to create a subcategory. The statement, "The mandated career path is stifling and takes away from my naval experience," is illustrative of such a comment. Almost a quarter of the career comments focused on the hardships of being married and away from home, or the effects of moving every two years. Comments on the FITREP process focused on the Navy's evaluation process, which plays a crucial role in career progression. The FITREP comments gave attention to evaluations based off merit (not by time at command), or revisions to the current FITREP process. Several other comments specifically addressed career progression and thus were grouped into a separate category. These focused on how individuals advance through career choices. Career Progression comments focused on the current career path offered for an EOD Officer. Finally, a number of comments concerned retention and thus were grouped together. Such comments identified causes for separating from, or motives for staying in, the Navy.

3. Community

Community comments were sorted into four categories: general community, detailing, Limited Duty Officer (LDO), and leadership.[30] The majority of the comments in this category (53%) were directed at the leadership. The leadership comments focused on a lack of community vision and endstate and, in some instances, directly called out leadership positions for failing their subordinates. General comments made up the second largest category. Examples of a general comment about the community are, "Bring more EOD officers into the strategic/operational conversation" or "the EOD community does a

[30] A Limited Duty Officer (LDO) is an officer who commissioned after serving at least eight years as an enlisted sailor. The purpose of an LDO is to provide technical background skills to the officer corps that would not usually be developed through a more traditional commission source such as a service academy or a Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC). See http://www.public.navy.mil/bupersnpc/officer/communitymanagers/ldo_cwo/Pages/default.aspx.

poor job recognizing talent." Comments regarding detailing focused on the detailing process within the community. Community detailers are responsible for balancing the needs of the Navy with individual career goals. They are responsible for writing orders for individuals within the community to "ensure personnel distribution," or in other words, to match the individual with the needs of the Navy.[31] In the private sector, this would be the equivalent of talent management or human resourcing. The LDO subcategory makes up a small percentage of the community comments. In fact, they make up less than 1% of the total comments. However, the small number of comments is because of the 229 respondents, only fifteen were LDOs. Thus, in spite of this small number, they were grouped into a separate category in order to capture the opinions of this highly experienced minority. The LDO comments focused on both removing the restrictions from the billets they can fill and adding some diversity to the LDOs' career pipeline.

4. Education

Comments concerning education were grouped into a single category. These captured respondents' desire to pursue graduate or postgraduate level education opportunities.

5. Gender

There were only a handful of comments regarding gender. This may, however, reflect the fact that only 3% of EOD officers are female and that females were more likely to express a grievance than males.[32] Whether this, indeed, is what occurred is difficult to know since it is impossible to tie specific comments to respondents' demographic information. However, most of the comments tended to express vague sentiments, such as "treat genders equal"; thus, it seems likely that women EOD officers were more likely to express a grievance concerning gender.

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[31] "Officer Community Management and Detailing," Navy Personnel Command, accessed on October 13, 2016, http://www.public.navy.mil/bupers-npc/officer/Pages/default2.aspx.

[32] CDR Sara Olsen, email message to author, August 9, 2016.

6. Mentor

Mentor comments focused on the Navy's formal mentorship program and unofficial mentor relationships, and they were grouped together. The formal mentorship program was established in 2013. Its primary objective was to "provide guidance, with a focus on instituting a formal approach to developing leaders, retaining talent and enhancing career development, without creating an additional administrative burden."[33] Unfortunately, many of the comments suggested general dissatisfaction with the program or how it has been implemented. Leadership revised the Mentorship program late in 2015, yet it is unclear whether the comments generated target the recent revisions or the original instruction.

7. Structure

The structure category consists of comments toward the current chain of command or force layout to include Mobile Unit mission break down, deployments, and manning. Some of these comments focused on empowering the Junior Officers more, while others called for a strong focus on a single mission such as Mine Counter Measures or supporting Special Operation Forces.

8. Training

Comments concerning training focused on operational training requirements and were divided into four categories: general training, career course, junior officer training, and the training manual.[34] The general training comments reflect a wide spectrum of observations and critiques, some of which focused on the early phases of training (e.g., dive school and EOD school), while others focused on the Fleet Readiness Training Plan (FRTP).[35] Career course is an all-encompassing term for professional training aimed at

[33] Department of the Navy, *COMNECC/COMNECCPAC INSTRUCTION 5300.1A Explosive Ordnance Disposal Warfare Officer's Mentoring Program*, 2015.

[34] The Training Manual's (COMEODGRUTWO/ONE M-3502 series (EOD TRAMAN)) purpose is to outline "policy, procedures and responsibilities for all aspects of training" for EOD leadership. It serves as a guide to conduct thorough training to ensure a high level of operational readiness.

[35] According to Section 2 in the EOD TRAMAN, the FRTP is a 24 to 32 month long training cycle designed to guide EOD training.

various paygrades and designed to shape and professionalize the force with vital knowledge at key career milestones. Almost a third of the training comments focused on Junior Officer Training. In the last decade, community leadership increased effort to provide appropriate training to the junior officers. Much of this training has been well received, but, according to the survey comments, there are some individuals who still feel it is lacking. Concerns regarding the training manual received the fewest number of comments, but due to its key role during the FRTP process, it befits the EOD community to consider these comments.

9. Other

The final category includes those comments that cannot be sorted into any of the other categories, and they concern a wide range of topics from equipment to personal experiences. Due to the lack of consistency in this category, it has little quantitative value. However, a close study of these comments may provide qualitative insight to community leadership.

B. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Many of the responses reflected more than one category. For example, a response such as, "I have gone back and forth on whether or not I want to separate from the community. While the Critical Skills Retention Bonus (CSRB) is tempting, it does not help me reach my end goal of making time for graduate level education," could be sorted into multiple categories. Initially, the respondent mentions both separating and the CSRB (a force shaping tool), and thus could be coded under Career. However, later the respondent notes that he or she would like to attend graduate school, so it could be coded as an Education comment. How were comments like this resolved? They were coded into multiple categories—in this case, Career and Education.

C. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The data were coded in two ways. Initially, just the responses from Question 32 were recorded and analyzed. The results from this analysis are presented in Table 1. Next, responses from Question 34 that addressed change in the EOD were coded and then

combined with the original data from Question 32. These results are presented in Table 2. In most cases, the distribution of responses (i.e., their percentage) varied little. Career comments displayed the largest increase (+3.2%), while structure comments decreased the most (-3.7%).

Table 1. Question 32 Response Patterns

Question 32 Responses	
Category	Percentage
Career	23.5%
Structure	16.0%
Training	14.5%
Administrative Requirements	14.0%
Community	14.0%
Other	10.4%
Education	3.6%
Mentor	2.2%
Recategorize	0.9%
Gender	0.9%
Total	100.0%

Table 1 shows the distribution of responses to Question 32. There was not a majority in any of the categories, but a few categories do stand out among the others. The most common category was Career, containing career centric comments (23.5%), while comments regarding Structure (16.0%), Training (14.5%), Administrative Requirements (14.0%), and Community (14.0%) were not too far behind. The statistical difference in responses between the latter four categories is minimal, so each category in this grouping should be considered equally important. Finally, comments regarding education (3.6%), mentorship (2.2%), and gender (0.9%) were rare, but still provide insight to the leadership. The category, “Recategorize,” reflects two comments (out of 220) that did not apply to the question in any sense. Therefore, these responses were not sorted into the “Other” category because although they did address the topic, they did not recur enough to be identified as a separate category.

Table 2 presents the distribution of responses to Questions 32 and 34 combined. For the most part, the distribution of responses is similar to that presented in Table 1. Career-centric comments are the most common (26.8%) with comments regarding Community (15.4%), Administrative Requirements (15.1%), Training (13.2%), and Structure (12.3%) following, albeit in a slightly different ranked order. As before, comments regarding Education (3.9%), Mentorship (3.0%), and Gender (0.6%) were relatively rare.

Table 2. Q32 and Q34 Combined Response Patterns

Question 32 & 34 Responses Combined	
Category	Percentage
Career	26.8%
Community	15.4%
Administrative Requirements	15.1%
Training	13.2%
Structure	12.3%
Other	9.0%
Education	3.9%
Mentor	3.0%
Gender	0.6%
Recategorize	0.6%
Total	100.0%

All of the categories in Table 2 indicate grievances that could result in officer separation. While none of the categories took an overwhelming majority, the Career-oriented comments do stand out to be the most prevalent. The paragraphs below provide a snapshot of the three categories that received attention during the interview process—Career, Community, and Administrative Requirements.

1. Career

As noted earlier, Career comments focused on an individual's progress through the community. In particular, they focused on the promotion process, retention, separation, or any force shaping tool (whether that be financial incentives or desirable

assignments). Table 3 breaks the Career comments into a series of subcategories. The purpose of the Career category is to capture the intent of DOPMA regulations. The comments that were coded Career suggested and/or critiqued a policy change that is beyond the scope of the EOD community's leadership. As addressed earlier, DOPMA policy change requires legislative action. While the survey results indicate there is a need for change with DOPMA regulation, they do not concur with Kane's analysis of the severity of the issue.

Table 3. Breakdown of Career-Oriented Responses

Career		
Category	Percentage (Q32)	Percentage (Q34)
Career-General	48.1%	37.5%
Career-Family	23.1%	26.1%
Career-Retention	13.5%	22.7%
Career-FITREP	7.7%	6.8%
Career-LDO	0.0%	2.3%
Career-Progression	7.7%	4.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

The breakdown for career responses that involved family is 26.0% (7.0% of the aggregate). As mentioned previously, these were responses that directly correlated to a sense of career and family balance. An illustrative example of this would be, "I enjoy my job, but moving every two to three years has a negative impact on my wife's career." The percentage identifying family as a grievance is substantially less than Kane's combined score of 81%. There could be a demographic explanation for this difference, but the underlying demographics of Kane's results are unavailable, so it is impossible to know. However, 72% of the individuals surveyed by NPRST are married.

Career-Retention comments made up almost a quarter of the career responses. Although this subcategory lacks the density that is seen in Career-Family, almost all of Career-Family's comments share similar sentiments (e.g., "the constant moving is

adversely affecting my family"). Career-Retention comments do not have a pattern of grievance other than that the comments are directly tied to possible separation. For example, one individual made a correlation between his or her willingness to stay in the community and the community's inability to challenge him; whereas, another individual made a similar correlation between separation and workplace politics. While the data provides qualitative value, the lack of consistency gives it little quantitative value. The other three subcategories, Career-FITREP, Career-LDO, and Career-Progression, which generated the least amount of comments, make up less than 15% of the category.

2. Community

Community comments focused on issues across the entire EOD Officer Corps. The comments were subcategorized into general, leadership, LDO, and detailing. Community-Leadership generated the most responses in Q32, but when combined with the data from Q34 it fell to a close second behind Community-General responses. Two major patterns emerged from Community-Leadership: a general displeasure with EOD Officer Leadership and the higher leadership's failure to communicate strategy and vision to the lower levels. Fortunately, both are within the leadership's ability to remedy. As mentioned previously, the Community-LDO comments focused on more job opportunities within the EOD sphere of influence. Lastly, Community-Detailing potentially could have been grouped with the Community-General comments, but many of the Community-Detailing responses were blatant and expressed displeasure with the process. These comments called for greater transparency when selecting for future duty stations and follow-on orders. The breakdown of Community responses is depicted in Table 4.

Table 4. Breakdown of Community-Oriented Responses

Community		
Category	Percentage (Q32)	Percentage (Q34)
Community-Leadership	53.1%	44.2%
Community-General	37.5%	46.1%
Community-LDO	6.3%	5.8%
Community-Detailing	3.1%	3.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

3. Administrative Requirements

Unlike the other two previous categories, the homogeneity of this category only requires one sub-category, Administrative Requirements-EOD Warfare Qualification. Even then, the general pattern of the sub-category closely aligns with the theme of the category. Whereas the category has a strong focus to alleviate unnecessary administrative requirements, the sub-category takes the same grievance and directs it toward the EOD Officer Warfare Qualification. Table 5 indicates the breakdown of Administrative Requirement responses.

Table 5. Breakdown of Administrative Requirement Responses

Administrative Requirements		
Category	Percentage (Q32)	Percentage (Q34)
Administrative Requirements-General	54.8%	46.0%
Administrative Requirements-EOD Warfare Qualification	45.2%	54.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

D. CONCLUSION

The comments generated from the NPRST's survey provide critical insight into the grievances with active duty EOD officers. This chapter identified patterns within the survey that enable community decision makers to prioritize the grievances and implement policies. While this chapter provides a quantitative metric, this does not necessarily mean the category with the highest percentage is indicative of the most important of all the categories listed. In this instance, the Career category generated the most responses. Unfortunately, many of the revisions needed to implement career changes are beyond the scope of EOD leadership. Instead, leadership may choose to direct its attention to those major grievances that are within its influence, such as improving methods to communicate the community's mission and end state, or alleviate unnecessary administrative burdens. The results explored in the final section of this chapter parallel the categories identified in the interview process of this thesis as well. That interview process will be explored in the following chapter.

III. INTERVIEWS WITH FORMER ACTIVE DUTY EOD OFFICERS

The interviews for this thesis were conducted in accordance with Naval Postgraduate School Institutional Review Board (IRB) standards. All subjects were volunteers who learned of the research through third parties. Furthermore, they had all formerly served in the EOD Officer corps within the last ten years. Most were accepted into the research; however, a few were turned away in an effort to cover a wider spectrum of year groups and a male/female proportion that more accurately reflects the community's demographics. Prior to each interview, the candidate signed a written consent form that detailed the purpose and methodology of the research. During the interview process, a deliberate effort was made not to lead the subjects. If a subject provided a vague or inconclusive response to a question, he or she was asked to elaborate until the topic was fully explored. At no time during an interview were answers from other subjects shared. These precautions were crucial to maintaining the research's integrity.

In total, nine subjects were selected to be interviewed. Seven were interviewed over the phone, one was interviewed in person,[36] and one was not interviewed because, during the research window, the subject was unavailable. Regardless, the eight subjects provided sufficient information to identify possible factors that could lead officers to separate from the EOD community. Seven were male and one was female. Six were married, one was single, and two were divorced.[37] The majority of the interviewees currently work in small businesses, playing key roles in management and logistics. Many of the descriptions of their current jobs reflect responsibilities similar to the Operations or Executive officer at a Mobile Unit. Time in service varied from subject to subject, but the average was 7.8 years, which is somewhat lower than the anticipated eight- to ten-year mark for separation from the community. Two of the subjects left the community as

[36] This format proved to be the most advantageous, because of the social atmosphere between the subject and myself.

[37] One of the subjects remarried.

Lieutenant Commanders (O-4), while the other six left as Lieutenants (O-3). This data point may explain why the average time served was lower than anticipated, since, typically, an EOD officer will not be promoted to Lieutenant Commander until the ten-year mark.

A. SEPARATION FACTORS

This section explores the grievances and factors that led to the subjects' separation from the community. They are sorted into themes that emerged from the interview process. Many of the responses explored below were answers to the question, "Do you remember the leading factors that led to this decision [to separate]?" Others were answers to the question, "What do you miss the least about being a part of the EOD community?" The factors are not presented in any specific order.

There was no significant pattern correlating to command type at time of separation: three of the subjects were at staffs, three of the subjects were at tactically operational units, and two were at shore-based detachments. However, there was a correlation as to when the decision was made to separate. Many of the subjects' remarks indicate an interest in leaving when their operational time came to an end. For instance, Subject 4 decided to leave during his last deployment when he realized he would be "*behind a desk*" for the rest of his career. Subjects 2, 5, and 6 expressed similar sentiments, although Subject 5 admitted that when he commissioned he was unsure how long he would stay in the Navy. *"I never thought I was going to do twenty, but I was open to it if things lined up. It was the right time to separate. As I shifted from operational to administrative [roles], I realized I could spend desk time anywhere. In short, I took my career day by day."* Similarly, Subject 7 remarked that he was never "*dead set*" on making a twenty-year career out of the Navy. Attrition such as this is important to recognize. There will always be individuals whom the service will be unable to retain, regardless of policy changes. Fortunately, a certain level of attrition is natural and can be predicted by personnel managers.

When the participants were asked what they missed or liked most about the EOD community, the response was unanimous: the people or the camaraderie. All expressed

gratitude for the opportunity to work with such high-caliber individuals and experience the camaraderie that the community breeds. Some displayed a high level of brevity when asked what they missed the most, such as the Subject 1, who just responded with "*camaraderie*." Others were almost consumed by the nostalgia. Subject 3 responded, "*The camaraderie experienced within the EOD Community and the bond shared among the brotherhood/sisterhood is something that few experience outside of the community*." Subject 5 responded, "*Camaraderie. I miss being a part of something special. Everyone in the community is a performer and that creates a sense of pride. Additionally, it was such a variety of people coming together for the same cause*" and Subject 7 responded, "*The trust I experienced with the people around me was unprecedented. We trusted each other with our lives. That doesn't exist in the civilian world. Everyone is out for themselves*." A similar pattern is also seen in the survey data. When the participants were asked what they like most about the community, 60% responded with the people or the camaraderie, and an additional 6% answered with culture. An argument could be made that these two themes are too closely related to distinguish between them. However, these responses present a challenge to research that has found that individuals who are more deeply embedded in an organization are less likely to leave than those serving on its periphery.[38] Within the EOD community, it appears that even those who are deeply embedded are leaving.[39]

Nevertheless, the community should take tremendous pride in the fact that both those who are currently serving and those who have served value their colleagues and the bonds shared, yet the community's strong ties should embolden the senior leadership to also address retention problems in the officer corps. The expressed unanimity regarding the personnel and camaraderie testifies to the effectiveness of the enlisted and officer recruiting programs. However, attracting the best and brightest will only benefit the

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[38] Pamela A. Popielarz and J. Miller McPherson. 1995. "On the Edge or in Between: Niche Position, Niche Overlap, and the Duration of Voluntary Association Memberships." *American Journal of Sociology* 101(3):698-720; Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge. 1980. "Networks of Faith: Interpersonal Bonds and Recruitment to Cults and Sects." *American Journal of Sociology* 85(6):1376-95.

[39] Such a conclusion, of course, assumes that "camaraderie" is a good measure of embeddedness in the EOD community. A better test of the theory would be to compare the level of embeddedness of those who left and those who stayed, while controlling for a host of other potential factors.

community if it can retain them long enough to profit from the very attributes that made them desirable recruits in the first place.

B. FAMILY STABILITY

Six of the eight subjects felt their family life played a dominant role in the reason for their departure. While many expressed different versions of the grievance, they all identified that absence from their family and/or constant moving was unacceptable with where they, as individuals, wanted to be in their lives. For example, one of Subject 1's immediate family members was diagnosed with a terminal illness. However, the subject's leadership was unwilling to accommodate this special circumstance, so the subject ultimately left the service. This is consistent with the findings from the NPC study reflecting the importance of a family life and a military career balance. One NPC participant made the following comment on family stability:

> *The amount of time spent away from family during the FRTP, ULT cycles and deployments. I have been in the EOD Community for almost twelve years, and out of this time I have performed eight FRPT cycles and been deployed eight times supporting three different Mobile Units. I have only been around for maybe two years of my six-year marriage and maybe a year of child's life total. It is taking a toll on my mental, physical, and professional wellbeing.*

Similarly, subjects 2, 3, 5, and 6 from the interviews showed concern for the health of their marriage as a consequence of their being gone and/or moving. *"one factor was family. With the unpredictability in determining where my next orders would take me, I was at a point in my relationship with my now wife, where I believed that the relationship would have suffered detrimentally if I had not resigned and continued to serve."* Subject 5 expressed a similar grievance. *"I felt like the people I was disconnected from were the people that meant the most to me. The thought of being away from the kids I wanted to have with my wife was huge."* In short, both the NPC survey and the interviews conducted for this thesis suggest that family concerns stand out as a primary grievance.

C. LEADERSHIP

In one capacity or another, many of the subjects also expressed displeasure with their leadership at the time they were in the service. Many of these responses mirrored a trend within the NPC survey: a feeling that the community lacks vision or fails to communicate vision to the junior levels. Subjects 1, 2, 4, and 6 all expressed similar sentiments, but subject 6 articulated it the best:

> *The leadership failed to give clear direction for the way ahead, but it was very clear that my job was changing. There was just so much uncertainty with the wars winding down. It was my experience at other commands when the vision becomes less clear, the morale begins to fail. I didn't want to go through that again. I kept hearing it over and over again that the community was refocusing on MCM, but I was an MCM commander, and I never saw that with funding or training opportunities. I didn't know what I should be doing to further my career.*

Compare these remarks to those of a NPC survey participant:

> *Improve strategic alignment/community vision for our officers to accomplish/work toward in key staff positions at COCOMs, TSOCs and Task Force. What are the key things we (EOD leadership) want for our community out of these positions? We have ability to influence and represent Navy EOD, but what is our endstate? If it is just PRODEV in order to develop and be EOD CO's these are great opportunities, but I think we can do more with guidance and a common strategic understanding of where we want to influence so we are all on message. We all have potential to act as de facto EOD LNOs, not just be staff officers.*

Furthermore, many of the subjects felt as if leadership did not have the junior officers' best interests at heart when making decisions. Subject 4 reflected on his time as a platoon commander. During a post-deployment brief with his CO, the CO expressed more interest in the PowerPoint's format than the returning platoon. This led Subject 4 to feel as if he and his guys were "*under appreciated*" by the leadership. Subject 2 and Subject 4 both agreed that the leadership at the Group level and higher did not appear to be moving the community in a healthy direction. Subject 5 called attention to the fact that the excessive administrative burdens were more important to the leadership than training, even though the latter carried the potential to prevent injury or death. Both Subjects 2 and

4 felt that the leadership could have made a greater effort to alleviate the junior leadership from administrative burdens.

As noted earlier, grievances directed at leadership were present, but not as prominent in the NPC survey. In fact, only 7% of the comments from the NPC survey focused on community leadership, whereas a majority of the former active duty officers addressed this concern. The difference in data may indicate a pattern leading to separation. As time goes on, an individual's disillusionment grows until separation seems a more reasonable solution. This suggests that there may be a disconnect between the junior officers and the senior officers of the community. In that regard, it is possible the community could greatly benefit from both sides of the table coming together to better understand the other's perspective.

D. MILITARY BUREAUCRACY

More than half of the interviewed subjects stated that the military bureaucracy was a factor that led to their separation from the community. This is potentially significant because not one active duty member who participated in the NPC survey complained about military bureaucracy. Instead, they complained about administrative requirements. A clearer understanding of the distinction between military bureaucracy and administrative requirements may provide insight in how to retain a small percentage of the personnel separating. In the interview process, Subject 7 associated military bureaucracy with the time it took to implement change. He also noted that, "*The atmosphere made it difficult to be creative and innovative. Creativity and innovativeness happens* [sic] *quick. The military bureaucracy cannot keep up with it*." Subject 8 agreed.

> *The military bureaucracy limits an innovative atmosphere that allows change to be implemented. The career path is a good example of this, it's an antiquated system. If someone wants to stay at a lower rank, why not? Maybe they can be a greater use to the community. Individuals should be allowed to choose their own career after deciding to come into the Navy.*

Subject 2's perspective of military bureaucracy differed greatly. He provided an example of an officer who served eighteen years in the service with distinction, but was fired because a junior enlisted got drunk and did something "*stupid*." Furthermore,

Subject 2 did not believe it was realistic for the community to meet all of the requirements that are expected of it by the Navy, despite strong efforts. Subject 2 was the most outspoken of the subjects about the military bureaucracy.

To gain better insight into their frustration with military bureaucracy, the subjects were asked a follow-up question: How did they define military bureaucracy? They were encouraged to use examples, with the intention, for purposes of this research, of being able to assemble an all-encompassing definition from their combined input. Some of the subjects failed to come up with a detailed response. Military bureaucracy to them was an intangible that existed in the work place. However, a few provided responses that were helpful. Subject 2's definition of military bureaucracy is the vaguest, but its elements are consistent with all of the other responses:

> *Bureaucracy to me, means many different echelons of leadership having oversight and decision making authority over the actions of an organization, unit, platoon, and/or squad. This could be where a squad requests permission to perform a mission or a task, and it must travel up several rungs in order to get approval to execute. On the flipside, this could be a decision that is mandated from the top rung, and gets modified or made more complex as it travels down the rungs of leadership to squad level.*

Put simply, Subject 2 identified military bureaucracy as oversight that impedes progress, and it does not necessarily have to come from the highest levels of leadership. Subject 2 believed that every leadership level has an opportunity to impose its influence.
Subject 5's definition was similar to that of Subject 2:

> *Military Bureaucracy is self-inflicted roadblocks that hinder productivity and efficiency that results from having a well-defined chain of command where each level of the chain does not feel empowered to act. As a result, every decision and action is made at a high level by people who are too far removed from the process to make an accurate decision.*

Subject 4's definition was broader and encompassed a wide spectrum of grievances ranging from a zero defect mentality to an overly centralized form of leadership.

> *people start making decisions based on what is going to keep them out of trouble…not what is best for the unit, team, or their supported unit. People who embrace this as the way of the future really buy in and only add more bureaucratic processes through online systems, reporting requirements, etc.*

Subject 4 referenced the EOD community's supply chain as an example. From his perspective, several of the items that were issued at the time were worthless. They failed to meet the needs of the force, but the community was restricted in its ability to quickly alleviate the disconnect, so instead each platoon was permitted to purchase the items it needed on a government credit card. Subject 5 described this as a "*waste of time and money*." Subject 6's definition mirrors Subject 5's:

> *I would define military bureaucracy as any administrative burden that doesn't reflect reality or is disproportionately burdensome. For example, a big requirement of any officer is the oversight of training and readiness. I always had to create binders that had to document training and adherence to certain readiness expectations and usually the amount of time and resources spent preparing and maintaining those documents exceeded the time spent doing actual training.*

Two common elements among all of the definitions are a focus on excessive administrative requirements that disrupt productivity and a highly centralized chain of command. As noted in the previous chapter, the survey identified a similar pattern with active duty personnel. One survey participant commented the following. *"We are bogged down with paper work and programs that are not helping us train or complete any mission... Multiple programs reporting the same thing that aren't correct anyways need to be streamlined."* Another survey participant expressed a similar grievance. *"Administrative burden. NKO, FLTMPS, ESAMS, DJRS, RCRP, DRRS-N, ASM, BOL, DTS, EOD portal, etc., are enough to drive anyone crazy. It is ridiculous to expect a Platoon Commander or OIC to stay on top of all these programs and still juggle their [sic] operational requirements."*[40] The common pattern between the quantitative and

[40] "NKO, FLTMPS, ESAMS, DJRS, RCRP, DRRS-N, ASM, BOL, DTS, EOD portal, etc." The acronyms listed are all different reporting programs that an OIC must be familiar with in order to ensure his unit's readiness.

qualitative data emphasizes the need to mitigate the administrative burden the community puts on its personnel.

E. OPERATIONAL TO ADMINISTRATIVE TRANSITION

Several of the subjects left the service when their billets shifted (or were about to shift) from operational to administrative, and many identified this as a factor for their separation. Subject 2 described his future in the community as "*not rewarding*." Subject 4 articulated the importance of a fulfilling career in his final comments, "*If you want to hold on to the strong, smart, dynamic guys, you have to give them careers that are like them. You have to craft a career that attracts them.*" Subject 7 was appreciative of his time in the EOD Officer corps, but felt that he "*couldn't reach [his] full potential*."

Admittedly, this factor was not as prominent in the NPC survey, but some of the respondents made similar remarks. For example, one commented: "The whole idea of being operational for a short blip in a 20-year career, then being required to hit the OPS, XO, CO, etc., wickets in succession with aspirations only to get back to a Mobile Unit doesn't inspire me. Personally, the biggest change that would both move the community forward, add career options, and inspire me to stay would be bringing the 1140X program online." Taken together, these comments suggest that a future policy shift that enables talented officers to remain in operational billets for an additional tour may lead to higher retention. This will be explored in the concluding chapter, which focuses on possible policies to mitigate officer separation.

F. CONCLUSION

The volunteers who participated in the interview process provided unique qualitative data to this research. Their time in the EOD Officer Corps followed by a decision to separate can potentially provide key insight into grievances that lead to officer separation. Furthermore, the volunteers' input provides perspective to NPRST's study, which only surveyed active duty members. Without the interviews, the survey is an incomplete dataset that only provides half of the picture.

This chapter explored the interview process, but also identified four major patterns in the interviewees' responses. The interviews indicated that family stability, leadership, military bureaucracy, and an officer's operational time all played factors in the participants' respective decisions to separate. The interviews confirm the survey's results. This complementary data may enable and empower EOD Officer Leadership to take action with confidence.

IV. CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This final chapter focuses on possible policy shifts indicated by the research conducted during this study. Two caveats are in order, however: the author makes no pretense of understanding all facets of the community management process, and, moreover, the author recognizes that the suggested policies require more research in addition to what has been provided here.

A. LONGER TOURS, FOUR-YEAR ORDERS

As addressed above, family stability was a prominent grievance in the survey and also proved to be an influencing factor that led many of the interview subjects to leave the community. Community leadership could present the argument that in recent years efforts to limit unnecessary moves have been taken by consolidating commands into two main geographical hubs—San Diego, CA, and Virginia Beach, VA. Prior to this, commands were spread up and down each coast. Community leadership may also present the argument that moving is a part of being in the military, and while it may not always suit Navy service members, they are paid to meet the needs of the Navy. Both of these arguments are be valid, but the research may suggest they are also outdated and need to be reexamined.

One possible solution to mitigating personnel moves is to increase the time spent at a single command. Currently, EOD officer orders are usually written for a two-year period, which means an unlucky individual may never be afforded the opportunity to settle down in an area before he begins to plan his next move. If the tour length was doubled, such a change, in theory could decrease the number of necessary moves during an officer's time serving in the community. However, there are some known second-order effects that the community leadership would have to be willing to accept.

According to the EOD Officer Community Manager, personnel accessions are based off filling first tour operational billets and having a large enough inventory to meet Lieutenant Commander (O-4) requirements. For the purpose of calculating accession numbers, the general rule is based on the former rather than the latter. Currently, there are

sixty-three first tour operational billets. Each year half of these billets are required to be filled while the other half complete their tour. In order for the community to be properly manned at the junior officer level, it must bring in half of the required billets plus a contingent to account for attrition. In this instance, the community brings in an additional three personnel to account for attrition during training. As a result, the community is required to take thirty-five officer personnel in order to maintain required manning levels.

If the tour length were doubled, it would greatly impact the accession numbers. The number of operational billets would remain the same (sixty-three), but instead of half of these billets opening each year, only a quarter would become available because personnel would be rotating out every four years instead of two. Again, the community would need to account for attrition in the training pipeline and would bring an additional three personnel. Therefore, the community would only need to assess nineteen personnel each year. The lower number of accessions would require all of the community's personnel requirements to be overhauled. Without a complete restructuring of the community, there would be even worse manning problems at the Lieutenant and Lieutenant Commander paygrades than currently exist. In short, the very issue that this course of action sought to alleviate, retention of senior Lieutenants and Lieutenant Commanders, would instead be exacerbated.

The community's ability to address the grievance with regard to frequent permanent change of station moves is limited. Both Tim Kane's data, and the data collected for this research, clearly indicate that such changes are a common concern among service members. Unfortunately, for the EOD Officer Corps, the required changes are above the community's leadership influence and are closely tied to DOPMA, which may be the reason why Kane calls for a complete overhaul of the military personnel system.

B. INCREASE OPERATIONAL TIME

Officers in both the survey and interviews expressed similar frustrations with the short operational time for an EOD officer. In that regard, extending operational time may be a strategy worth considering in order to retain junior officers. This does not mean that

every EOD officer's operational time will be extended. The policy this paper proposes is intended for those officers who have demonstrated exemplary leadership in addition to tactical and administrative expertise. The policy proposed is designed to serve as a force multiplier and a retention tool. The billets described below would be reserved for well-rounded, mature officers who possess an understanding of the administration and logistic skillsets needed to run an operation team, but who also seek an additional tour as an operational leader.

The proposed policy is as follows. After being selected in the community, the officer would attend initial training. Upon completion, the officer then would complete his or her first two tours just as he or she would in the current career pipeline. During the first two tours, the officer in question would be expected to complete all career milestones. Currently, those career milestones include the EOD Officer PQS and the EOD Officer Department Head (DH) PQS. Also, in keeping with the current career progression, the individual would do a shore tour at this time. This would include being an OIC at a shore-based detachment, attending the Naval Postgraduate School, or serving on a staff. However, by the proposed career progression, an officer would have already distinguished him or herself as a candidate for extended operational time. This would be reflected on his or her FITREPs and in conversation between the Mobile Unit leadership and the Officer Community Detailer. If the individual accepted the extended operational time, he or she would be required to go to a staff, preferably outside of the community. The purpose of sending the officer to a staff outside the community is to broaden his or her horizons and experiences within the military. Staff work for a junior officer has the potential to mature and provide perspective, which is what the community needs from a junior officer who is going to be regularly interacting with other inexperienced junior officers when he or she returns to the Mobile Unit as a Company Commander.

Currently, the Company Commander billet is not utilized properly. In many instances, an EOD Company Commander has only one more tour than that of his or her subordinate Platoon Commanders, which means that it is possible for the Company Commander to have been at the Mobile Unit only one more year than his or her Platoon Commanders—which reflects a blatant deficiency in knowledge and experience. The

proposed policy fills the Company Commander billets with well-rounded EOD officers who have at least eight years of experience in the Navy.

One argument that may be presented against this policy shift is that it may affect the promotion rates of the officers who were selected and accepted to extend operational time. Figures 1 and 2 are diagrams of the current career progression and the proposed career progression, respectively.

Figure 1. Current Career Progression

Figure 2. Proposed Career Progression

As the figures illustrate, initially the two career progressions are identical until the third tour after training. The current career progression provides options for the officer to go to a shore tour, whereas the proposed career progression sends what would be a young, top performing Lieutenant to a staff. The main distinction between the two career progressions takes place at the six- to eight-year mark, where those who are selected for extended operational time return to the Mobile Unit for a Company Commander tour, as opposed to the original career progression that would send them to a staff or a Department Head billet. Under the new proposed career progression, the same type of billets is being hit, although in a different time line. Therefore, it is hard to believe that the proposed career progression would affect promotion rates. Additionally, in the last seven years, the percentage of those who promote, versus those who are in-zone eligible, is just below 90% for the EOD community, almost fifteen percentage points more than the Navy's average. Ultimately, the promotion rate for EOD officers renders this concern insignificant.

C. CONCLUSION

The author makes no claims that this paper addresses all concerns of EOD Officer personnel retention. Additionally, the author acknowledges that the subject is much greater than anticipated, and the research into this topic encountered many loopholes, dead ends and convoluted instructions (*Military Bureaucracy).* In fact, one of the largest obstacles encountered in this research was limiting the problem set to a reasonable focus and not digressing. Lastly, the author does not claim the policies proposed herein lack shortfalls that will need to be addressed. Nonetheless, this paper does attempt to provide compelling data that concludes there are significant trends within the EOD community that result in officer separation. Unfortunately, some of these trends are potentially beyond the community leadership's influence, while others are well within its sphere of influence, including extended operational time.

Ultimately, regardless of rank, the data indicate the greatest attribute the community has is its people. The majority of the survey and interview data did not articulate a particular rank or group. The response was simple and unanimous—the people and the camaraderie. If these are the EOD community's greatest attributes, perhaps they should be used to address a problem that has plagued the officer community for over a decade. The people in the EOD community thrive in an environment that encourages their innovative spirit, and it is this innovative spirit that makes them exemplary performers at their profession—the ability to not be confined by standard operating procedures and to succeed at complex problems with complex parameters that are beyond normal influence. Perhaps that same spirit should be applied to resolve the current retention problem?

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